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SUBJECT: FIJI UPDATE 1/10/07: GCC, MAJOR CHURCHES ACCEPT  
INTERIM GOVERNMENT; MORE APPOINTMENTS

REF: SUVA 20

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

#### Summary

1. (C) The Chairman of Fiji's Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) and leaders of the Methodist and Catholic churches have accepted Bainimarama's interim government while urging a return to democracy soon. Military pastors have asked their flock to do a Lenten-type fast for the next month as all pray for Bainimarama to receive "divine help" in steering Fiji. The military has reinforced its message for PM Qarase to remain in Lau. Opposition Leader Beddoes, one of the few prominent people continuing to protest publicly against abuses, was visited by troops last weekend. They threatened: stop speaking or be "taken away." Former Police Assistant Commissioner Tikotikoca, who has been working in the Solomon Islands, has accepted Bainimarama's offer to be Police Commissioner. A well-regarded CEO, Parmesh Chand, is moving to become CEO in the PM's office. Our comment discusses the motives driving various interim ministers. End summary.

#### GCC and major churches accept interim government

2. (U) According to media reports, GCC chairman Bokini said on Jan. 10 that he fully supports President Iloilo's appointment of the interim government. Bokini reportedly urged the people of Fiji to support Bainimarama and his ministers. He said, "It is time to move on," and he urged the interim administration to work hard to return Fiji to democratic rule. The Methodist Church and the Catholic Church of Fiji also announced support for the interim government, asking the nation to get behind efforts to move forward toward a return to democracy.

#### Military to Qarase: stay in Lau

3. (U) PM Qarase has told the media that a military officer phoned late last week. The message was: stay in Lau and let the interim government run the country. RFMF spokesman Leweni today reconfirmed the message. Qarase, who had predicted he would travel to Suva shortly, now says he does not know when he will return to the capital.

#### RFMF month of fasting

4. (U) At special church services in major RFMF camps on Sunday, Jan. 7, pastors announced that everyone in the RFMF will fast for a month, until Feb. 4. All soldiers will be expected to give up some pleasure, kind of like Lent. Pastors asked all to pray during the month, seeking "divine

help" for Commodore Bainimarama "in steering the nation forward."

#### Protesting intimidation

15. (U) Mick Beddoes, Opposition Leader during the Qarase Government, made public yesterday that six soldiers visited him during the weekend on orders from Land Forces Commander Driti. They told him to stop speaking out or he "would be taken away." Thereafter, Beddoes expressed public disappointment that his colleague in Parliament, Bernadette Rounds-Ganilau, accepted a position in the interim administration.

#### No Chaudhry follow-through re protesters

16. (C) When we raised the plight of human-rights protesters during a phone call from FLP leader Chaudhry on Jan. 8 (see Suva 18), he said he intended to highlight the issue during remarks at his swearing-in as an interim minister the next day. In fact, he described the text he intended to use, apparently reading from a script. In the end Chaudhry did not raise the issue publicly.

#### More appointments

17. (C) Two more appointments for the interim administration have surfaced:

-- Romanu Tikotikoca, Commissioner of Police. Tikotikoca told Fiji TV on Jan. 9 that he has accepted the position, replacing acting Commissioner Jimi Koroi. Tikotikoca most recently was head of security for the Solomon Islands Gold

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Ridge mine, after serving as a Fiji Police official with RAMSI in the Solomons. Previously, Tikotikoca was an Assistant Commissioner of Police. He reportedly had received advice from former Police Commissioner Hughes and Deputy Commissioner Driver not to take the Commissioner job until a civilian-led government is in place in Fiji. He, like most other appointees, said he feels the need to help the nation move forward.

-- Parmesh Chand, CEO for the PM's Office. Chand is shifting from CEO for Public Enterprise Reform. In the Qarase Government, Chand was the only remaining ethnic-Indian CEO. He has a very strong reputation as a manager. Some weeks ago, just after the coup, he gave us the distinct impression that he thought the takeover was very unfortunate. More recently, some old friends of his have sensed a personality change. Bainimarama called on Chand to head an investigative team looking into the close-down of the Vatukuola gold mine, and we hear he complained that one expat mine manager ought to be "roughed up." We understand Chand has been one of those phoning people, recruiting for the interim cabinet.

#### Comment on motives

18. (C) A number of the civilians who have taken jobs in the interim government have commented, one way or another, that a factor was their growing sense that the "interim" administration will be in place for quite a while. Nobody is saying just how long, but certainly there is a sense it will be years, not months, before the military decides the "clean up" is concluded and appropriate systems are in place for a fresh election. We expect some un-electable figures, like Ratu Epeli Ganilau, see this as a "once in a lifetime" opportunity to govern. Some, perhaps including Ganilau, must see it as an opportunity to scramble out of financial crises. The Interim Minister for Local Government, Jone Navakamocera, was surprisingly frank in a TV interview. He said he spent F\$40,000 (US\$27,000) to win an SDL seat in the 2006 election, and he owed it to his family to seek a ministerial portfolio in the interim government in order to recoup his investment. Some, perhaps like Rounds-Ganilau, appear to have judged that

Bainimarama has clearly won, and good people must now attempt to help bring Fiji back from the abyss.  
DINGER